

Rare Books

The Tale of an Auctioneer A Treatise on Bookworms What the Dealers Are Doing

"I SUPPOSE every one connected with the sale of old books has at some time a desire to enter the auction field," said one man recently. "I had an attack of this kind some years back and gratified the propensity to the utter extinction of the few hundred dollars I then had, along with a number of thousands I had succeeded in getting others to invest with me in the seductive game."

"It seemed so easy, so simple, to gather in collections of books and sell them; it required so little capital to get other people's property and sell on a commission basis. Of course, I must issue catalogues of my sales, do some advertising, pay out something for printing, supplies and postage; but as nearly all of this could be charged up against the consignments, I would be nothing out of pocket, my commissions being all velvet."

He Hires an "Expert."

"With such ideas I opened up my doors for material and soon had quite a good lot with which to begin. As I had made no provision up to that time for the services of a competent cataloguer I was faced with the necessity for a person skilled in the work. Inquiry soon developed that these were legion, and after listening to tales of how expert they all were, how books of little value had been made to fetch enormous prices by skilful handling, I settled down on one individual as the one for my money and he began work."

"As I had little knowledge of this important part of the business I left to this man the production of that first catalogue. I presume no catalogue ever issued by an auction house was ever less calculated to inspire either confidence or respect. It was absolutely hideous and so filled with errors of ignorance and typography as to be a laughing stock among those who knew what it should have been."

Rehearsing the Sale.

"As the day of sale approached I proceeded to break in one of my office force as an auctioneer. Night after night for two weeks rehearsals were held, the men in the place representing the crowd of eager bidders. The clerk who acted as salesman was very nervous, and the boys proceeded to make it interesting for him by shouting 'Louder!' 'Not so loud!' 'Faster!' &c. There were 325 lots in the first session, and if the auctioneer preserved the same speed at the actual sale as at rehearsals he could probably finish in about four hours."

"On the day of sale only a few numbers had been disposed of when one of those kindly spirits who are always about pointed out a woful misdescription in the catalogue of the item then being offered, and there was pandemonium in a few moments. Such friends as had assembled to see me inaugurate my auction career attempted to stem the flood of catcalls and controversy without avail. Explanation that the error was made by the printer did not mollify the objector, who contended that only the man who prepared the catalogue and read the proof could be responsible."

Graft.

"All things end somewhere some time. The audience began to clamor, 'Proceed with the sale!' In three hours and forty minutes the session was ended. The sale was a success in respect of prices, but some great bargains slipped through because my cataloguer had covered up by ambiguities and errors notable features of certain books. Some time after I discovered that this expert was working with an accomplice who knew just what to bid on, having had information in advance of the sale, enabling him to get some of the best things at prices so ridiculous that it was common talk among persons who knew books that my sales looked crooked. I learned later that the cataloguer had put valuable books in large bundles which sold for very low prices, and when the accomplice bought."

"All my troubles were not in the selling end. My bookkeeping department had in three months so successfully balled up the books that I was compelled to call in the services of an expert accountant. After two months hard work he finally struck a balance which showed the concern in debt for a considerable amount. Sales had been held once a week, good prices had been obtained, earnings were ample, and yet, in face of all these encouraging factors, ruin was impending. Consignments that should have been properly catalogued in a week or less were on the floor a month before a catalogue was ready for the printer, my salary list being thus expanded and made more than double what it should have been. I found my bookkeeper was in cahoots with my printer and got a rakeoff on catalogues, so that what I should have had for about \$1.25 a page was costing me nearly \$2."

"A cleaning out of the gang that had been making ducks and drakes of my business, with a series of fine sales, saved the day for the time, but just about the time I felt myself more secure panicky conditions

made their appearance in the business world. They marked my exodus from an enterprise of a kind I hope never to be associated with again."

Osler on Bookworms.

Amid the other activities of a busy life Sir William Osler found time to make an investigation of the ravages of the bookworm, upon which he wrote a monograph with colored illustrations, taken from a live specimen he found in Vol. 2 of *Historie abrégée de la dernière persécution de Port Royal*, which had been sent to him by a Paris bookseller.

In the monograph Dr. Osler tells of the different varieties as they are found in various countries. Usually these small pests are found only in old books—that is, books printed before 1800, but the writer has seen books printed within the last fifty years that showed the curious burrowings of the worm.

We Help Make \$28.

Here is a story with a moral: *Books and the Book World* published July 14 an account of how a Fourth avenue bookseller had bought certain first editions that were very rare, and how, without recognizing their value, he had sold them at ridiculous prices. H. S. Nichols, who had read the article, took a look through his Thirty-third street store and discovered a copy of *On the Trail of Stenstrom*, which he had marked to sell at \$2. He at once marked the book up to \$30, and it was sold before the close of the day at the advanced price.

Since its organization in 1884 the Grolier Club of this city has published seventy-six exhibition catalogues that are exceptionally good works of bibliography. Often these have been the result of the labors of committees of the club, whose members have given the closest study to what they had in hand in order that the product should be authoritative. As most of the catalogues have come from the De Vinne Press the typography is of the finest.

An extraordinarily fine copy of Oliver Goldsmith's *The Stoops to Conquer*, first edition, was recently discovered in a bound volume of pamphlets at the Public Library.

Personal Notes.

Charles Everett of the Cadmus Book Shop leaves to-day for the bass fishing in Maine and will be gone a month, he says.

The Radical Book Shop has begun business in Chicago, to deal in the sort of books its name implies.

An out of town gentleman is searching the book shops for illustrations from *De Bry*.

John Howell of San Francisco is again in town looking up California material.

Catalogues Received.

From R. C. MacMahon, 78 West Fifty-fifth street, New York, a catalogue of very unusual books, 1,307 items, together with his special list of 129. Mr. MacMahon specializes in books that other dealers pay little or no attention to. His large clientele among the learned societies and universities indicates the character of his stock.

In the Auction Room.

At the Walpole Galleries, July 26, there was sold a fine collection of books on art, china, furniture, painting, &c., 317 items. Notwithstanding the warm day the attendance was good, prices ruling well up. Mr. Turnbull is to be congratulated upon keeping the season open and has demonstrated that books will sell now as well as in the fall and winter if they are desirable books.

A very interesting sale was held at Sotheby's in London, July 22-25, in which were a large number of letters of Shelley to his father. There had been a controversy between them regarding the disposition of entailed property, and Shelley used language to his father that was scarcely becoming in a son. These letters were recently discovered in the files of the family solicitors. Some interesting and valuable letters about the early life of Burns were also sold.

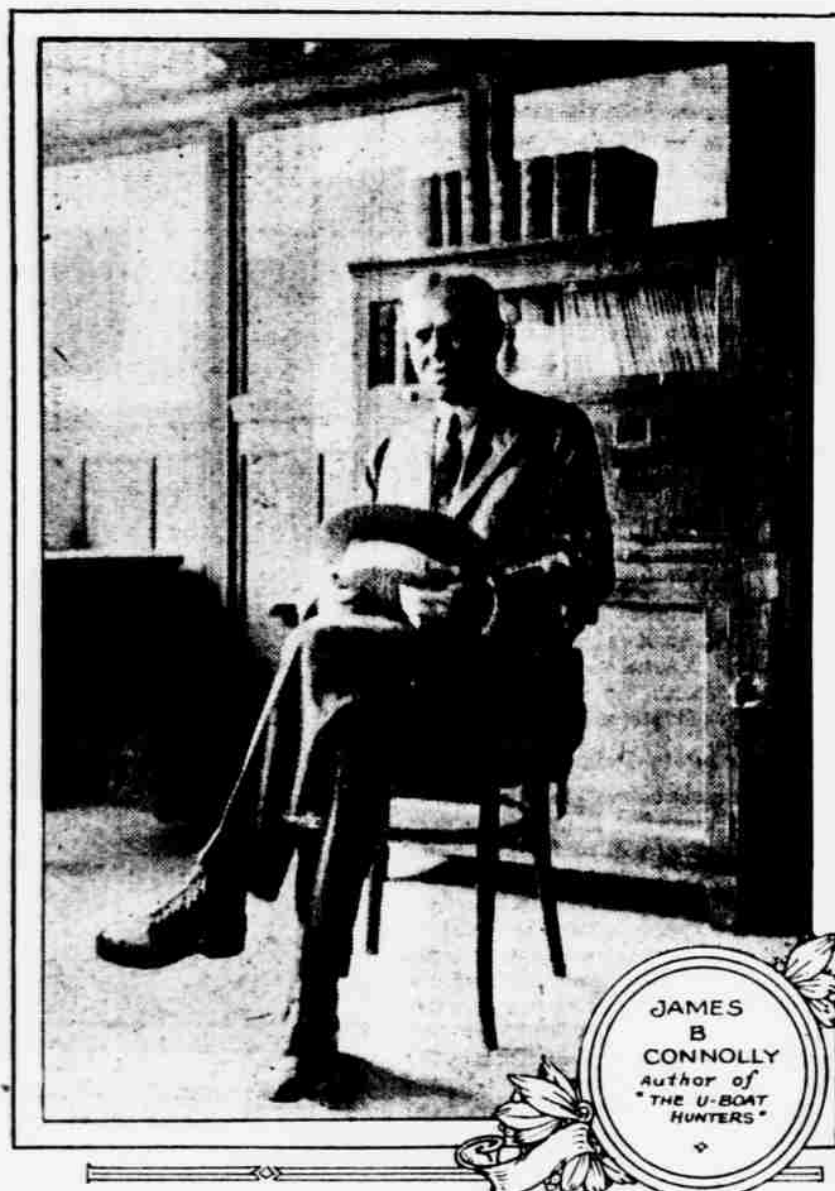
A Coming Sale.

At the Walpole Galleries, Thursday afternoon, August 8, there are to be sold Americana and books on the Indians, genealogy, coins and medals, association books, New Yorkiana, autographs, &c., 332 lots. Many scarce items are in this sale. Dealers will be especially interested in the catalogue.

Replies to Questions.

Miss V. B. Peckskill, N. Y.—The *Ulster County Gazette*, of which you say you have a copy, is quite likely a facsimile. If such a paper really ever had an existence no copy of such an original has ever been seen by the writer. There have been numerous issues of such a sheet and many persons who have found themselves in possession of one of these have felt positive that it was a genuine original issue; but upon comparison of the paper upon which it was printed with paper made in that period it was demonstrated that the *Gazette* was printed on paper made many years after the date it bore, and was, therefore, a fraud. But even if the paper did exist, and the copy was undoubtedly genuine, its value would be scarcely more than a dollar. Many pamphlets of that time that give details of Washington's death and burial, and which are exceedingly rare, bring but little more than that price. Only an examination would disclose whether your copy was one of the facsimiles.

"The U-Boat Hunters"



THIS part of *Books and the Book World* has never sympathized with Col. Roosevelt's enthusiasm for the fiction of James B. Connolly. By personal experience Connolly knows the sea and several kinds of seafaring life as well as Conrad or (implying no bracketing, of course) the late Morgan Robertson.

Conrad is a seer. Poor Robertson, by prodigious toil, became a dependable yarn spinning craftsman and, at times when he wasn't Jules Verneing it, something of an artist. Now Connolly is personally too normal to be a seer and he is too honest and genuine to make himself at home in art. Here, for all his riches of material, mere visitors to the seas like Kipling or even Jack London (London was a dilettante sailorman) beat Connolly's best to pieces with their worst. When he is telling a short story he screws up his natural muscular style to a bad mannerism and his memories suffer from cramps of the romantics.

But send him hunting U-boats with the American destroyers and let him simply report it, leaving art to take care of herself, and—there this early-middle-aged lad Jim Connolly is the boy! No artist could touch him. He goes into things heels over head and is instantly part of the game; his writing fixes part of the game, too. He has collected his articles, touching them up a little, in a book called *The U-Boat Hunters*, which not only gives the best idea to date of the vital and adventurous routine of transport convoy and the purging of the sea, but promises to hold its province, whatever deluge of leisurely reminiscences may pour out of the presses after peace.

Slapping down the picture as he finds it, without much more time to deliberate than is given to reporters for daily papers, and with a first class reporter's condensation and homely clarity, he often achieves "literature" that could not be improved. Going over he sights the French coast a moment before an attack by the U-boats: "It was a dream of a day, the sea like a green-tinted mirror, the sky blue as paint and the softest little breath of air floating off the land toward us." And the animated account of the fight, transports banging and clashing, the wicked destroyers knitting handily in and out, the wakes of hidden submarines appearing and disappearing, the hurry of the soldiers to the lifeboat stations, the jar of the explosion of a depth bomb—is open to no comment except praise.

So is most of the book. Four pages that tell how the passing funeral of a child hushed the feverish streets of the French port are classic in a kind of writing—especially dear to this newspaper's

tradition. Certainly the reader will not forget them.

The publishers rightly believe that the mere titles of the chapters suggest what is in store as well as can be done in small space. The chapters make good on the titles. Here they are: *Navy Ships, Navy Men, Seeing Them Across, The U-Boats Appear, Crossing the Channel, The Censors, One They Didn't Get, The Doctor Takes Charge, The 343 Stays Up, The Cargo Boats, Flotilla Humor—At Sea, Flotilla Humor—Ashore, The Unquenchable Destroyer Boys, The Marines Have Loaded, The Navy as a Career, The Sea Babies*.

If the best chapter had to be chosen verdict might be given for *The Doctor Takes Charge*, which recounts the experience of a green young Southern surgeon with a great heart who found himself ranking naval officer on a shell-damaged merchant ship that had lost her convoy by night. It has any fiction of Connolly's lashed to the mast; and as much could be said of most fiction by other writers.

Going out with our destroyers, in spite of the disapproval of both English and American Admirals, Connolly had and made for himself a wonderful opportunity. He did more; he rose to it—and *The U-Boat Hunters* (capitally bound, printed and illustrated, by the way) is a war book for unqualified recommendation.

THE U-BOAT HUNTERS. BY JAMES B. CONNOLLY. Charles Scribner's Sons. \$1.50.

A diplomatic despatch received in Washington the other day stated that German democrats in Switzerland were elated over the escape from Berlin of Prof. G. F. Nicolai in an airplane, which took him to Copenhagen. The German authorities believe or wish it to be believed that the escape was made possible through the connivance of a French engineer, who is said to have been found working under a false name in a machine factory at Danzig. Prof. Nicolai's book, *The Biology of War*, will be published in a translation by the Century Company.

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